

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report 21

August-September, 1978

FOCUS ON MENNONITE WOMEN AND CAREERS

More Mennonite women today are seeing opportunities for service expanded beyond the home. Smaller families, increased educational experiences, growing egalitarian practices of parenting and household responsibilities have freed many women to seek employment and/or pick up previous careers following their early childrearing years. Added to this is society's emphasis on and the church's acceptance of women developing to their fullest potential.

Behavioral scientists point out that many women have "high level needs of self-fulfillment" that cannot be solely met in the homemaking role. These women seek careers or jobs that provide recognition, a sense of accomplishment and a creative experience which enhances their self-esteem. However, a career will only provide that deep psychological need if it is a "chosen" work.

In our society many women have no alternative but to seek employment. Economic necessity forces them to work outside the home. Women who find themselves in a job situation not of their choosing may not necessarily find it a satisfactory creative life experience.

In this Task Force Report we are not attempting to suggest that self-fulfillment found through a meaningful career is the ultimate for women. Many aspects of a career are mundane, repetitive chores. Career women, as well as men, encounter many frustrations in their work. Nor is the job the only environment for creating feelings of self-worth. Many women find psychologically rewarding and creative activities in homemaking or volunteer work in church and community.

Many careers women choose gratify needs to serve and to nurture--nursing, teaching, social work. For Christian women the motivation is the desire to serve God in ministering to others beyond the sphere of family.

To help focus the theme, "Mennonite Women and Careers," three women write about their careers: what meaning careers have in their lives, the adjustments working outside the home created for them, and attitudes of family and church toward their working. The writers are a married woman who maintained her career while raising a family, a widow who choose a career after her family were all in school, and a single adult with varying jobs.

--Anna Mary Brubacher, Kitchener, Ontario. *(Thanks to Anna Mary, one of the three Canadian members of the Task Force, for collecting materials for this issue.)*

WORKING MOTHER: SERVICE ON THE HOME FRONT

Last summer my nursing class from La Junta, Colorado, celebrated our twenty-fifth anniversary. Sixteen of us graduated; all sixteen married, are parents and have worked full, or part time, since marriage, in various aspects of nursing. What motivated us to continue our careers along with the demands of homemaking and parenting? In 1952 there were many voices in the church saying, "A mother's place is in the home." It is not the "in thing" to be a working mother.

Our hospital's motto was "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Our class motto was, "God our guide; service our path; success our goal." People like the late Allan Erb, and our director, Maude Swartzentruber, were models who joyously, but without fanfare, dedicated their lives to service. There was a great demand for nurses at this time, but it seemed our training was more service than job oriented. To us "total care" meant being aware of a person's total needs; physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Even before training in La Junta I was conditioned to see a profession as a door to service. When I took teacher's training in Saskatoon, Sask., in the mid-forties, one assignment of poetry contained the following lines: "It's the lives of tomorrow we mold and set. This is the call to teach."

I never really thought seriously about the issue of "to work or not to work" until after marriage, and after the birth of our first child. Living in Kitchener and attending First Menmonite Church, I quickly discovered I was out of my school environment. Most of my married peers did not have careers and did not work outside their homes. My service career was a job! It seemed acceptable for me to work before we had a family. (It also helped to pay off my school bills and get a down payment on the house!) Attitudes changed after we had a family so after we purchased our home we decided my uniform would go to the attic --after all, every Mother's Day sermon glorified mother as the "keeper of the home."

My time off revolved around teaching Sunday School, vacation Bible School, gardening, cooking, entertaining, sewing, coffee with the neighbors, etc. I was not bored or frustrated, but I felt a part of me was dying.

When our second daughter was several months old I was asked to "special" a friend who had surgery. At the hospital it was like coming home, and I felt the experience unbelievably exhilarating. It was then my husband and I sensed how much I missed this part of my life. We decided to compromise and thus I began to work part-time as a float relief nurse at our local hospital.

Because of family and church background I did have to deal with some feelings of guilt. I tried to be a "super" parent and wife to contradict remarks such as, "Your daughter probably cries when you leave her in class because she thinks you are going to work" or "Poor Milt, what does he do when you are away nursing?" I also, unwisely, tried to compensate by doing everything I had done previously at home and at church.

Too many people seemed to view my career as purely monetary, or as an escape from homemaking. They did not seem to understand that beyond the advantages of extra money and a stimulating diversion, nursing was my call to serve God and others. I pondered, "Why is it so wonderful for missionary mothers to teach and nurse, and so wrong for a mother on the home front?" I was too timid and too much in the minority to voice my frustrations at that time. In a sense this subtle opposition was a blessing because it forced by husband and me to seriously monitor the effect my career had on our relationship as a family.

Twelve years ago when our daughters were nine and twelve years of age, I was asked to work for the local Children's Aid Society as a child care worker. This would mean "full-time" employment. After a family conference we decided I would try this new aspect of nursing. In reality it was a new career.

It was a difficult transition, not only because it was full-time, but because there were many new lessons and new attitudes to learn. My widowed aunt became our "keeper at home" for one year to ease the transition. I found this work to be an extension of hospital nursing. Here I found out what can happen to children when parents have psychiatric, personality or debilitating physical problems. My corridors in this career included schools, doctor's offices, public health clinics, and other community agencies.

Looking back some twenty years I feel my career has expanded my horizons and has given me a better understanding of people. I have learned to value all people as individuals worthy of respect and love. Each person has something to teach me. I am still learning to pray often for wisdom, patience and understanding to be more accepting and less judgemental.

Because of career-related experiences, I am less tempted to be an overprotective mother. I feel my outside encounters have made me a more interesting and mature wife. Household chores are shared; we automatically function as a team, each doing our preferred bit.

My career has given me a practical application of the meaning of being "Christian," and thus I hope I have been an asset to my church. I do not feel every mother needs a career, nor is a career the answer to all of life's frustrations. I strongly believe motherhood needs to have high priority. However, regardless of gender, each person needs to assess his/her talents and opportunities and use them as God directs. In my life this seemed to happen by opportunities presented or denied, by council of friends and by special requests. It has not always been an easy road but I would do it again. God intends for each of us joy, satisfaction and personal growth as we serve Him and our neighbors.

Agnes Eby, Waterloo, Ontario

CAREER BRINGS SELF-ESTEEM

In May 1971 I began employment as a child care worker for the Children's Aid Society,

in Kitchener, Ontario after having been solely a homemaker for twenty-five years. Seeking employment was a necessity since my husband died in 1961. At the time of his death I became a recipient of welfare to provide for my children. Although I knew we were deserving and entitled to these monies, I felt like a freeloader and inferior to other people. At times I found it difficult to hold my head high. With this background of receiving monthly welfare checks, earning a paycheck now gave me a sense of accomplishment. It put me in the category of "respectable" people who make their own living.

How did this career come about? Doors were opened for me in unusual ways. I had no particular training. A former Sunday School pupil who had taken a course in social services at a nearby community college suggested I would be a good candidate for the course. After giving it prayerful thought, I applied. Even though many applied and only a limited number were admitted, I was accepted.

Upon completion of the two year course another hurdle was finding a job. I had no difficulty in securing employment at the agency where I had worked in field placement and where I have continued to work. I believe God was making a way for me.

My family has been supportive of my pursuing a career. My youngest child was thirteen at the time of my seeking employment. Five children were still at home. The children had to take on more responsibilities of housekeeping. As a full-time homemaker I had worked out a schedule for such routine things as laundry, cleaning, and baking. Now these chores had to be done evenings and weekends and not as often. Some details took on less significance. Because the children were pleased that I had gotten a job, they were cooperative for the most part.

My friends and church family have all been supportive of my pursuing a career. If there has been criticism, I am unaware of it. However, I feel some people place more importance on what I do than is legitimate. This is particularly true of those not working outside the home.

The job has provided me with the necessities of life and has restored my self-esteem. Because I am in a helping profession, I have special opportunities of sharing a Christ-like love, of forgiving, of going the second mile, in helping to restore relationships.

In the seven years of working I have felt a sense of being needed, of being where God wanted me to be, of having opportunities to love and care for persons who were hurting. There have been difficult and distasteful things to do, but I have sensed a freedom to demonstrate what I believe as a follower of Jesus.

Doris Kramer, St. Jacobs, Ontario

CAREER NOT THE SECRET OF FULFILLMENT

My observation of life thus far has led me to the conclusion that the ingredients that make for fulfillment are service and creativity. Jobs are simply the environment in which one practices these. Service and creativity are the outgrowth of basic life attitudes. To expect one's job or career to supply them is likely to bring disappointment.

Christians have a rich resource for developing a life attitude of service and creativity, because these are part of our Christian heritage. Jesus was the supreme example of a servant. His service was both creative and sacrificial. It was creative in that he broke through the bonds and conventions of his society. He taught "Love your enemies" and ministered to the Samaritan woman. It was sacrificial to the point of costing him his life.

The theme of creation is the very first one in the Bible. God is the great creator. He created man and woman and to them he gave the command to "be fruitful and multiply" and to "have dominion over" his created world. In the biblical account of creation God contemplated the work of each day and declared it to be "good." Creativity in order to be fulfilling needs to have a certain quality.

While visiting a Catholic retreat and training center, the person giving us a tour of

of the grounds made the statement, "We do nothing spectacular here. We simply do the ordinary jobs of making meals and washing clothes, but we do them the best we can." Herein, I think, lies the secret of true fulfillment. The satisfaction of a job well-done (even when it has to be done again next meal time, tomorrow, or next week) is the stuff out of which fulfillment is made. However, the "well-done" job may not become an obsession. It may not have to be better than Jane's or Mrs. Smith's or that also becomes binding and enslaving.

I am sure that it is easy to guess from the foregoing paragraphs that I speak from the perspective of having had various jobs and not one single career. I am not suggesting that this is ideal, but my experience has given me the background for my observations. I served with the Mission Board in Honduras at a time when that kind of service was highly esteemed. It was that experience which helped me to see that service abroad is made up of the same ingredients as service in one's home community. It is done in the milieu of ordinary living. To be sure there are the challenges of a new language and culture among others, but there is also the pain of the weekly filling, wick cleaning and relighting of the kerosene refrigerator--and then doing it again if you didn't do it right the first time!

In the last several years my creativity has led me into church and family history. Since this does not pay very well, I have typed library cards, conference minutes, etc., to put the bread and butter on my table. Since I do not expect a specific job to fulfill me, it is comparatively easy to move from one to the other or to not "work" at all for periods of time. Again I am not suggesting this as an ideal. I probably would insist, though, that a job should never be allowed to become a task-master.

Although I do not think that a job or career, including that of childbearing and child-nurturing ought to be expected to bear the whole weight of bringing us fulfillment, I am happy that our society including the church gives us the freedom

and possibility of many choices. I hope this freedom will continue to expand and will include that of not taking a "job" in the narrow sense of the term. In a very technological society the paying jobs may be the least creative. I hope we will also have the option to choose the things which may

not necessarily bring in a great deal of monetary reward. Hopefully we can use the freedoms of our society without allowing the "world" to squeeze us into its mold.

Lorraine Roth, Kitchener, Ontario

RELATED RESOURCES

Books (selected among many available)

- Bird, Caroline. Everything a Woman Needs to Know to Get Paid What She's Worth. New York: McKay, 1973.
- DuBrin, Andrew J. Women in Transition. Springfield, IL: Thomas Books, 1972.
- Hoffman, Lois Wladis and Nye, F. Ivan. Working Mothers. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1974.
- Loeser, Herta. Women, Work, and Volunteering. Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.
- Loring, Rosalind and Otto, Herb. New Life Options: The Working Woman's Resource Book. New York: McGraw Hill, 1976.
- Wiebe, Katie. Alone. Tyndale, 1976.

Films

- 51% A documentary of three women exposing some prevailing opinions about working women. Produced by the Robert Drucker Company. In Canada available through the International Tele-Film Co., 47 Densley Ave., Toronto, Ontario, M6M 5A1.
- A group of short films about working mothers, 1975. National Film Board of Canada, Box 6100, Montreal, Quebec.

RELATED RESOURCES ON BLACK WOMEN (*The following suggestions arrived too late to be included in the last issue.*)

- Bernard, J. The Story of Sojourner Truth. Norton, 1967.
- "Black Women in America: An Annotated Bibliography." The Black Scholar (December 1971), pp. 42-53.
- Jordan, June. Some Changes. Dutton, 1971.
- Murray, Pauli. Dark Testament and Other Poems. Silvermine. 1970.
- Peare, Catherine O. Mary McLeod Bethune. Vanguard, 1951.
- Tuesdell, Marilyn R. "Black Women and Religion--A Bibliography." Harvard University.
- Tobias, Tobi. Marian Anderson. Thomas Crowell, 1972.
- The World of Gwendolyn Brooks (poetry). Harper and Row, 1971.

LETTERS

Dear Gayle:

I am continuing to appreciate the Task Force on Women's paper--continue the good work! As editor of the Central District Women's page in the Reporter (General Conference), I would like your permission to print a form very similar to the form you printed for a resource listing of Mennonite women. The executive committee of the Central District Women in Mission has been intending to make such a listing for some time and we now wish to include it in the Reporter. Unless I hear from you to the contrary, I will plan to include it. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kay Ann Fransen

Dear Gayle:

Enclosed is a copy of our newsletter which I thought might be of interest to you since I got most of the data from the Report (June-July 1978) for my article on women in the ministry.

I enjoy reading the Report very much. As editor of Menno News I know how much effort goes into a publication of almost any size.

Sincerely yours,

Myrna R. Burkholder
Menno News, New York, NY

Following is an excerpt from Myrna's article, "Mennonite Women in the Ministry?"

In my opinion the pulpit represents the last stronghold of the male-oriented Mennonite church. The fact that women have been kept from ministerial roles poses a challenge for Mennonite feminists. It is with a sense of pride that I, as a feminist, see women functioning as ministers in churches such as Riverside Church where one of the ministers, a woman, is always in the pulpit as a participant in the Sunday morning service. It is with pride that I attended a morning service at Judson Memorial Church in which a woman

minister performed the wedding ceremony for her friend who was a member of the Judson congregation. Recently I was pleased to learn that in my old home congregation, the Goshen College Mennonite Church, a woman serves as Minister of Congregational Services (though she is not ordained).

How attractive is the ministry to women? As one friend of mine said, "Who wants to become a minister anyway?" While her reaction seemed amusing for its honesty, I too, wondered who would want to become a minister "anyway", feeling as unprepared as women in the Mennonite Church feel for taking responsibility in an area previously forbidden? Having woman-man teams seems to me to be a good way for women to ease into the ministry. First, congregations undoubtedly find it less threatening to have a woman as part of a team ministry. Secondly, it gives the women ministers a chance to gain confidence and experience before handling congregations themselves.

Dear Ma'am:

Thank you very much for sending me the paper on "Task Force on Women". It's such an eye-opener. I've enjoyed every paper and article so far. Our church is very much behind in everything to do with Christian women and their contribution . . .

June Redekop

NEWS

WOMEN SHARE CONCERNS AT WORLD CONFERENCE

"The conference was nothing less than tremendous. The feeling of international kinship was an exhilarating thing, a mind and heart expanding experience," reports Gladys Goering, Moundridge, Kansas. Gladys was a member of the inter-Mennonite women's committee which worked many long hours planning two special women's meals during Mennonite World Conference.

The International Women's Dinner, held Wednesday evening, July 26, was the highlight of the conference for some women, despite logistic difficulties and rushed

schedules. The Bethel College Mennonite Church women's bell choir presented several numbers and Enola Waters, Oklahoma, performed the Lord's Prayer in traditional Cheyenne Indian sign language. The 425 tickets for the dinner were sold out early, and many women had to be turned away.

A bag luncheon on Thursday noon gave an additional 210 women opportunity to fellowship and discuss mutual concerns. The emphasis on casual conversation was inadequate for some women, who had expected more formal input.

Roll calls showed that women from 25 countries attended the two meals. One hundred women from outside North America were present. Many of the women are actively involved in their home churches, including 9 ordained ministers and pastors, 9 deacons, 3 elders, 113 teachers, 17 missionaries and a wide variety of other roles.

An art print, "Wheatscape", designed by Ethel Abrahams, Hillsboro, Kansas, was given to each woman who attended the meals.

The Task Force sponsored 15 international women to attend the conference, most of them are from third world countries. Gladys Goering reported that the women with whom she talked were very appreciative of the opportunity to attend Mennonite World Conference. "One woman told me repeatedly that she just couldn't thank us enough for this heartwarming experience. We were much impressed by the quality of person and leadership they represented." Gladys added, though, that not all guests were equally appreciative.

At the Thursday meal, a Dutch woman representative from the General Council suggested that an official women's meeting be held at the next world conference. Besides special events for women, it is hoped that more women can be involved in planning and as major speakers as well as other significant roles in future world conferences.

PERSONS IN MINISTRY CONFERENCE

(the third, inter-Mennonite, ad hoc conference for women and men interested in

ministry roles in the Mennonite Church) is scheduled for October 27-29 at the Akron Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania.

Objectives: to bring together persons with this common interest; to move toward integration into the structures of the church; to recommend that women be considered for leadership positions in the church; to support each other in the development of our talents; to strengthen the self-concept of Mennonite women. The program will include: "Dealing with Damaged Emotions" (Arlene May); "Women in the Pulpit Ministry in Nineteenth Century U.S." (Dorothy Yoder Nyce); "Women in the Ministry Among Mennonites in My Lifetime (Ruth Brunk Stoltzfuz); "Women in the Structure of the Church--Acceptable Ways of Asserting" (panel); "Men, Women and Power" (Willard Swartley). Registration: \$10.00. Includes food. Lodging provided free in homes. Register with the Akron Mennonite Church, P.O. Box 208, Diamond St., Akron, PA 17501 before September 15.

CONFERENCIA FEMENIL HISPANA MENONITA, the fourth conference of Spanish Mennonite women met April 27-30 in Goshen, IN. Over 140 women, including delegates from 21 Hispanic congregations, attended. Mary Bustos, coordinator of the conference, was elected to represent Spanish women in the 1978 Spanish Council in Los Angeles. The Task Force asked Ellen Graber Kraybill, who speaks Spanish, to serve as a liaison. Ellen reports that Julia Campos' main points included:

1. Christ is head of the home.
2. Christ can liberate us from timidity and a sense of inferiority.
3. Don't overwork--things were made to serve us, not us to serve things.
4. We should take time to cultivate ourselves as persons (get out of the house, etc.)
5. Dialogue with families is important. Don't be afraid to question any of your husband's decisions. Man and wife are equal in Christ. Freedom of the gospel helps us dialogue together.
6. Don't be afraid of change. Change occurs when there is growth.
7. Be free to express emotions. Don't stifle emotions in your children; don't emphasize differences between your sons and daughter; Express your love for your family.

VERBS

Herta Fransen, an elementary school principal in the St. Catharines district, has recently become a member of the Conrad Grebel College Board of Governors, Waterloo, Ont.

Anna Juhnke, Bethel College professor, MCC U.S. Ministries board member, and an active member of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, wrote to the Wichita Eagle to ask why they were not covering the U.N. Special Session on Disarmament in May and June. In response they asked her to write something for them and she supplied half a page of excellent material on the need for disarmament and the importance of the SSOD.

Betsy Beyler, assistant director of MCC Peace Section's Washington office, recently returned from a month-long trip to Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia. Following the trip, she and MCC Asia secretary Vern Preheim were engaged in a number of Congressional appointments urging the U.S. to give reconstruction aid to Vietnam and to normalize relations with Vietnam.

Luann Habegger Martin, former Task Force member who is currently in Ghana with her husband who is an A.I.D. staff member in Accra, has begun research on her master's thesis on "The Ecology and Economics of Cooking Fuels in Ghana." "I've become more aware of what has been termed the energy crisis of the poor," she writes. "Most people in developing countries don't have to worry about getting gas for their cars or heating their homes. They do have to worry about getting firewood or charcoal. Deforestation and desertification are problems in much of West Africa. People--mainly women--have to walk further to get firewood. The price of charcoal keeps going up. The rich pay less to cook their food than the poor. A simple one-burner kerosene stove costs around \$5 a month to keep it fueled. However, the stove itself costs \$60. A poor person can't afford the initial investment. Yet they will have to pay \$18 a month for charcoal to use with their simple charcoal pot."

Anna Mary Brubacher, Kitchener, Ontario, a member of the Task Force, wrote to the Mennonite Church General Board noting concern for development of women's leadership skills. "The Task Force would like to see a leadership training workshop planned for women at the 1979 General Assembly in Waterloo," she wrote. "The workshop could serve as a model for conferences to plan seminars on developing leadership skills as well as provide a setting at Assembly for women to gain some resources and skills."

The Report is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church And Society. Correspondence should be sent to Gayle Gerber Koontz, 27 Fairlawn St., Everett, MA 02149.

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